

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 CU-02 DHA-02 IO-13 /073 W
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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2914
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL MEDAN
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL SURABAYA

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ID
SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR STUDENT UNREST

REF: JAKARTA 09164

1. SUMMARY. AN EMBASSY STUDY POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT CONCLUDES THAT STUDENT DISSENT, ALTHOUGH MORE VISIBLE THAN HERETOFORE, DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE SUHARTO REGIME, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE THE STUDENTS FACE MAJOR PROBLEMS IN ORGANIZING THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, HAVE YET TO HIT UPON A BROADLY POPULAR CAUSE AND HAVE NO MILITARY SUPPORT. NEVERTHELESS, FEARFUL OF DISTURBANCES DURING THE UPCOMING FUKUDA VISIT, THE GOVERNMENT IS RESPONDING WITH A VIGOROUS TWO PRONGED APPROACH TO THE STUDENT' THUS FAR LIMITED CHALLENGE, GIVING CLEAR WARNING THAT ITS PATIENCE IS WEARING THIN,

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WHILE HOLDING OUT HOPE OF A MORE PRODUCTIVE GOI-STUDENT DIALOGUE. THE CURRENT SPURT OF STUDENT POLITICAL MANEUVERING WILL PROBABLY SUBSIDE WITH THE ONSET OF FASTING MONTH, BUT WE EXPECT A NEW UPSURGE OF ACTIVITY THEREAFTER. THE ULTIMATE RESOLUTION DEPENDS ON THE RESTRAINT AND FINESSE OF THE GOI'S RESPONSE TO STUDENT

RESTLESSNESS. OUR CURRENT JUDGEMENT, REACHED WITH LESS THAN TOTAL CONFIDENCE, IS THAT GOI WILL MUDDLE THROUGH WITHOUT SERIOUS DAMAGE. END SUMMARY.

2. A NOTICEABLE UPSURGE IN STUDENT UNREST, WHICH GAINED IMPETUS DURING THE EMOTIONAL LEAVE TAKING OF POPULAR FORMER JAKARTA GOVERNOR ALI SADIKIN (REFTEL) AND HAS BEEN PROLONGED WITH PROTESTS OVER A RECENT RISE IN CITY BUS FARES, IS CLEARLY WORRYING THE GOI. A STUDENT EFFORT TO OBSTRUCT THE DISPATCH OF JAKARTA BUSSES RESULTED NOT ONLY IN THE TEMPORARY DETENTION AND QUESTIONING OF 54 STUDENTS BUT ALSO PRODUCED STRONG PUBLIC WARNINGS OF GOI ACTION AGAINST THOSE POLITICAL ELEMENTS INCITING THE STUDENT CAMPAIGN. MUCH OF THE GOI'S CONCERN STEMS FROM THE UP-COMING VISIT OF JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA, WHICH SOME GOI OFFICIALS FEAR COULD SPARK RIOTS SUCH AS OCCURRED DURING TANAKA'S 1974 VISIT.

3. THE THREAT WOULD NOT SEEM TO JUSTIFY THE GOI'S APPREHENSION. STUDENTS ARE ACTING INDIVIDUALLY OR IN SMALL GROUPS (THE BUS FARE DEMONSTRATION WAS BY FAR THE LARGEST RECENT PUBLIC GATHERING) AND ARE GENERALLY LIMITING THEIR ACTIVITY TO SPEECH-MAKING, PETITIONING AND THE LIKE. NATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS, PREOCCUPIED WITH THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS, HAVE SO FAR TAKEN NO PART IN STUDENT DISSIDENT ACTIVITY, AND SOME OF THE MOST CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY STUDENT COUNCILS - NOTABLY THE UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA'S - HAVE LARGELY STAYED ON THE SIDELINES.

4. A NUMBER OF FACTORS INHIBIT THE STUDENTS FROM DIRECTLY CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT. MOST IMPORTANT, THE STUDENTS FEAR ANOTHER SECURITY CRACKDOWN LIKE THE ONE AFTER THE 1974 MALARI RIOTS. UNLIKE 1974, MOREOVER, THE STUDENTS HAVE NO POWERFUL MILITARY PATRON WHO COULD PROVIDE SOME MEASURE OF PROTECTION SHOULD THE GOI ACT AGAINST THEM.

5. THE STUDENTS ALSO FEAR, UNDOUBTEDLY WITH GOOD REASON, INCREASED GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO PENETRATE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AND MANIPULATE THEIR ACTIVITIES. IT IS LARGEY BECAUSE OF THAT CONCERN THAT THEY ARE NOW OPERATING IN AD HOC, SMALL GROUPS, BASED ON PERSONAL LOYALTIES AND KNOWN IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS.

6. THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES ARE BESET BY ENORMOUS INSTITUTIONAL AND PERSONAL RIVALRIES AND HAVE NOT GENERALLY ACCEPTED OR GENUINELY CHARISMATIC LEADER. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS DISUNITY WAS THE CONSPICUOUS ABASENCE OF UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA STUDENTS FROM THE

RECENT BUS FARE CAMPAIGN.

7. FINALLY, THE STUDENTS HAVE THUS FAR LACKED ANY REAL CAUSE. TWO BUDDING ISSUES, HOWEVER, MAY PROVIDE THEM SOME AMMUNITION. THE GOVERNMENT IS IN THE PROCESS

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OF CHANGING ITS REGULATIONS CONTROLLING STUDENT ON-CAMPUS ACTIVITY AND, SHOULD IT MOVE TOO CRUDELY IN LIMITING THE STUDENTS' FREEDOM, COULD INSPIRE GREATER STUDENT UNITY AND SPARK CONFRONTATION. IN ADDITION, THE SON OF GOI POLITICO ALI MURTOPO WAS ARRESTED RECENTLY FOR INVOLVEMENT IN A FATAL SHOOTING INCIDENT, AND SHOULD THE GOI APPEAR TO GIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO HIM OR HIS FATHER (TO WHOM THE GUN IS SAID TO BELONG), STUDENTS (AND THE OPPOSITIONIST COMMUNITY IN GENERAL) COULD REACT STRONGLY. SINCE MURTOPO SYMBOLIZES FOR JAKARTA'S DISAFFECTED MUCH OF WHAT THEY FIND WRONG IN THE MILITARY REGIME, SOME FINESSE WILL BE REQUIRED TO SIDETRACK THIS ISSUE.

8. THE GOI, SPURRED BY ITS GROWING CONCERN, HAS EMBARKED ON A TWO - PRONGED POLICY OF CONTAINING AND DEFUSING STUDENT ACTIVISM. FIRST, IT HAS ISSUED CLEAR WARNINGS THAT ITS PATIENCE IS BEING STRAINED AND THAT THERE ARE REAL LIMITS TO PERMISSIBLE DISSIDENT ACTIVITY. IT IS NOW MOVING, AS

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IN THE CASE OF THE BUS FARE ARRESTS, TO BACK UP ITS
WARNINGS WITH DIRECT, REPRESSIVE ACTION.

9. SECOND, THE GOI IS TRYING TO OPEN A NEW DIALOGUE WITH
STUDENT LEADERS, THROUGH A SERIES OF WELL-PUBLICIZED VISITS
TO PROMINENT CAMPUSES BY RESPECTED SENIOR GOI OFFICIALS,
INCLUDING TECHNOCRAT MINISTERS. THE FIRST SUCH COLLOQUY
WAS HELD YESTERDAY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA. THESE
SESSIONS ARE UNLIKELY TO REMOVE THE BASIC CAUSE FOR
STUDENT UNREST, WHICH IS THE BELIEF THAT MEANINGFUL POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IS BEING DENIED THEM AND OTHERS. THEY
MAY, HOWEVER, PROVIDE A CHANNEL FOR LETTING OFF STEAM AND
WILL, AT A MINIMUM, BE PUBLIC EVIDENCE THAT THE GOI
TRIED COMMUNICATION FIRST, SHOULD IT LATER HAVE TO RESORT
TO STRONGER MEASURES.

10. FACED WITH THE GOI'S STRONG WORDS AND APPARENT
WILLINGNESS TO ACT, AND BESET BY THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS
AND LACK OF IMMEDIATE ISSUES, THE STUDENTS ARE LIKELY TO
RETRENCH IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. WE THINK REPETITION OF
THE 1974 RIOTS TO "CELEBRATE" THE VISIT OF FUKUDA IS UNLIKELY.
A PERIOD OF RELATIVE QUIET WILL PROBABLY PERSIST THROUGH THE
MOSLEM FASTING PERIOD RAMADAN, WHICH ENDS IN MID-SEPTEMBER.

11. STUDENT ACTIVISM IS LIKELY TO PICK UP AGAIN IN THE
FALL, AS THE GOI'S CURRENTLY FORBIDDING STATE OF ALERT
SLACKENS AND THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES HAVE A CHANCE TO
REGROUP. THE STUDENTS WILL HAVE A FERTILE CROP OF
ISSUES TO EXPLOIT, AS THE NEW PARLIAMENT
MEETS, GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION AND THE RUMORS ATTENDING
IT CONTINUE, AND ISSUES LIKE GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF
STUDENT CONDUCT AND PERHAPS THE MURTOPO SHOOTING INCIDENT
COME TO A HEAD. AS STUDENT AGITATION BUILDS, THE GOI
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WILL HAVE TO SHOW UNUSUAL RESTRAINT AND FINESSE TO AVOID
A DESTRUCTIVE SHOWDOWN. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT RESPOND WITH
A NEW CRACKDOWN, A LA MALARI, THEY WOULD INEVITABLY
SUCCEED IN SUPPRESSING THE EXPRESSION OF DISSENT, BUT
AT THE RISK OF BLOODSHED AND A SERIOUS SET BACK TO THE
PROCESS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT. WE CANNOT EVEN RULE OUT
THE POSSIBILITY THAT SUCH AN OVERREACTION WOULD LEAD
POWERFUL MILITARY ELEMENTS TO DECIDE THAT THE PRESIDENT'S
GRIP IS SLIPPING AND THAT THE SUCCESSION SHOULD BE

PREPARED, THOUGH WE CONTINUE TO RATE THIS POSSIBILITY
VERY LOW.

12. THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME IS FOR THE GOVERNMENT, USING
A COMBINATION OF CARROT AND STICK, TO MUDDLE THROUGH THE
MOST TENSE PERIOD AROUND SUHARTO'S RE-ELECTION, PERHAPS WITH
SOME ATTENDANT UNREST BUT NO SERIOUS BREAKDOWN OF ORDER OR
SIGNIFICANT LOSS OF PRESTIGE
OR POWER. IT IS INDICATIVE
OF THE SLOW EROSION OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND THE
INCREASING RESTIVENESS OF THE DISAFFECTED, HOWEVER, THAT WE
CAN STATE THIS CONCLUSION WITH LESS CONFIDENCE THAN BEFORE.
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